

PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Off-Highway Motorcycle (OHM) Riding

There is a wide range of motorcycles that can be driven “off-highway,” including those that are licensed, street-legal vehicles (sometimes referred to as dual-sport motorcycles) and those that are not registered with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT) (and thus not street-legal) but are registered with the DNR as recreational motorcycles (e.g., dirt bikes). Licensed, off-highway (dual-sport) motorcycles are allowed on all roads open to street-legal vehicles; motorcycles not licensed with the WDOT are not. A new registration program is in place to allow unlicensed OHMs on certain classifications of roads. Some public lands have specific trails designated for OHMs.

Desired Experiences and Site Selection Considerations

Desired experiences for OHMs range from gravel roads to primitive roads (“two-tracks”) to narrow “single-track” trails similar to those used by mountain bikers. Generally, riders prefer native-material roads and trails less than 4 feet in width. “Off-highway” does not mean “off-trail riding” or “free riding,” which is allowed on some designated portions of some public properties (notably in western states). Many dual-sport motorcycle riders piece together longer-distance tours that combine stretches on private and public roads and trails.

There is demand for both close-to-home experiences that can be smaller sized and still provide desirable experiences as well as large expansive areas with significant miles of trails for single or multi-day riding opportunities. Participants that travel to a destination for off-highway riding seem to prefer a minimum of 75 miles of roads and trails. Long, linear roads and trails are acceptable to access other trail systems, services, and scenic areas.

The trail or road bed has a significant influence on experience and, if poorly designed, can create a negative experience. There is a slightly higher desire for hilly terrain and scenic rides with views of forests, open natural areas, lakes, and streams. Highly disturbed areas can provide high quality challenge-style riding within a small area.

Site Selection on Department Lands

Although not as desirable as trails designed and dedicated for OHM use, there can be opportunities to include OHMs on designated ATV trails. There may be conflicts in passing width for trails, whether one-way or two-way. Consideration should be made in the design of trails and the mixed speeds that people may be recreating at (for instance, mountain bikes and motorcycles sharing a trail).

From a planning perspective consideration should be given to regional trails systems and town road designations as connections for access and services. Trail and road systems should be considered to address riders’ desired experiences including remote riding opportunities on closed loop systems and larger, more regional road and trail systems.



Characteristics of desirable riding experiences include the following:

- A minimum of 60 miles of trails should be provided, with 15 or more miles of connector routes or trails. Shorter trails providing access to a point of interest are acceptable.
 - Loop trails are typically 10 miles long or more. An OHM area usually provides a series of loop trails providing a variety of recreational riding experiences that return the participant to the trailhead.
 - Regional trails are point to point trails that can be several hundred miles long and traverse multiple jurisdictions and a combination of land ownership types. This trail corridor is often shared with other recreational uses.
- Varied terrain is preferable for this recreation experience, but steep slopes and unstable soils can affect development and maintenance costs and cause unnecessary resource damage. Areas with slopes exceeding 12% should be avoided, as should areas of sandy soils or peat and organic soils that are saturated for portions of the year. Trail segments with adverse conditions should be kept to a minimum for both long-term costs and for environmental reasons.

A designated use trail is necessary for this facility type. A designated OHM trail may be placed on lands with most NR 44 land classifications, but recreational use settings will always be Type 3 (NR44.06) or Type 4 (NR44.07). Note that this use may not occur on land with a Type 3 recreational use setting, non-motorized recreation area (NR44.07(6)(h)), and is not compatible with Type 1 (NR44.07(4)) or Type 2 (NR 44.07(5)) recreational use settings.

Notable Differences in Participation or Opportunities Across the State

The majority of the longer riding opportunities are on public lands with the vast majority in the northern half of the state. There are thousands of miles of primitive roads in northern Wisconsin on state, county and Federal lands that allow street-licensed vehicles (i.e. dual-sport motorcycles). There is a cluster of designated OHM trails in Jackson and Clark counties. The Richard Bong State Recreation Area is an example of the smaller-scale, shorter trail opportunities in southeast Wisconsin. Some state trails on old railroad beds allow OHM use, many of which provide connections to other trail and road networks.

Notable Times of the Year of High or Low Participation

Use is very seasonal in nature, occurring mostly between late spring and fall. Many roads and trails are closed in the spring due to seasonal thawing and there is no winter use. Late summer and fall can be a very enjoyable recreation and tourism period with fall colors and cooler temperatures.

Participation

Participation Rate and Frequency

Based on a 2016 survey of Wisconsin residents conducted for the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), it is estimated that 7% of adult Wisconsin residents participate in OHM riding. This ranked #56 out of 64 activities evaluated.

Days/year	% of OHM Riders
1 to 2	33
3 to 9	20
10 to 29	22
30 or more	25
Total	100%



In terms of frequency, participants that engaged in OHM riding did so with considerably more frequency than participants in other types of recreation (OHM riding ranked #8 in frequency out of 64 activities evaluated).

Estimated Trends

As the number of riding opportunities has risen there has been an associated rise in the number of OHM riders and motorcycles purchased, especially dual-sport machines. Although Wisconsin specific data are not available, nationally the number of dual-sport motorcycles sold grew 7.8% in 2015 while off-highway (dirt bikes) increased 1.9% (Statista 2018).

An indicator of the growth in dual-sport motorcycle riding in Wisconsin is the growing interest in organized riding events and GPS-guided rides. Since dual-sport machines can be ridden on public roads, a popular activity is for clubs to develop organized tours that combine riding off-road (on forest and farm roads or along agricultural fields) with connections on local roads. These tours are often up to 100 miles in length and require pre-registration (and a limited number of riders). As dual-sport riding has increased in popularity, enrollment in these events has grown and it is now common for available slots to fill up in less than a day.

Another form of dual-sport motorcycle riding that has also substantially increased in popularity is following a tour based on a GPS-guided route. The GPS coordinates for different tours are available for download from several sources on the internet allowing riders to pursue an outing at their leisure. While this activity has seen much growth, as of late, it has been predicted to see a decrease in overall participation rates due to the aging population and increase in Hispanic population (White et al. 2016).

Demographics

As can be seen from the SCORP survey results in the table below, participants in OHM riding in Wisconsin tend to be younger, rural men. Because of the upfront costs as well as the expenses associated with use and maintenance, OHM riding can require more of a financial investment than many other outdoor activities. This likely shifts some participation to older age groups that typically have more disposable income.

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	17	44
	30-39	6	14
	40-49	7	13
	50-59	7	17
	60-69	6	12
	70 and older	1	1
	Total	--	100
Gender	Female	6	42
	Male	8	58
	Total	--	100
Residence	Rural	9	59
	Urban	6	41
	Total	--	100



References

- Statista. 2018. Change in U.S. motorcycle sales as of June 2017, by type.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/252267/change-in-us-motorcycle-sales-by-type/>. Accessed May, 2018.
- White, E.M., J.M. Bowker, A.E. Askew, L.L. Langner, J.R. Arnold, and D.B.K. English. 2016. *Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends: Effects on Economic Opportunities*. United States Department of Agriculture.

